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SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF KOSOVO: KOSTUNICA'S FULCRUM

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Serbia's Ministry of Kosovo and Metohija (MOK) emerged as a new ministry during the government coalition negotiations following Serbia's January 2007 parliamentary elections. The Ministry aims to coordinate Serbia's Kosovo policy by combining the operational elements of the existing Coordinating Center for Kosovo (CCK) with a new cabinet-level organization responsible for intra-GOS coordination as well as the GOS's bilateral and multilateral engagement on Kosovo issues. The Ministry of Kosovo still has work to do before it is fully online, but it is clear that the Ministry is wholly Kostunica/DSS run and aims to manage Kosovo policy -- a considerable portion of the GOS' activity -- through its coordination of other (mostly Tadic/DS-run) ministries. Interestingly, MOK officials draw from Parliament's empowerment of the Kosovo negotiating team rather than the Ministry's legal basis in order to bypass other governmental institutions in ways unavailable to ministries. The way in which the GOS has handled their "secret plan" for the Russians to use at Kennebunkport as well as their hands-off approach to possible demonstrations by Serbs on Vitovdan (June 28) in Kosovo illustrate this process. End Summary.

Personnel and Logistics

12. (SBU) Serbia's Ministry of Kosovo and Metohija was created during the government formation discussions following the January 2007 parliamentary elections. The Law of Ministries passed by the new parliament officially brought the MOK online (relevant section of Law in para 13). Slobodan Samardzic, Prime Minister Kostunica's top Kosovo advisor and chief negotiator to the UNOSK talks, is the Minister (official bio in paragraph 12). In the weeks after the new Ministry was announced, Ljubomir Kljakic and Branislava Aleksander -- both longtime Samardzic associates (and DSS apparatchiks) -- were named Assistant Ministers. Dusan Prorokovic, another DSS member and formerly head of the Kosovo Committee in parliament, has been named state secretary. The Coordinating Center for Kosovo (CCK) has

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been subsumed into the MOK and will be headed by Vuko Antonijevic, replacing Sanda Raskovic-Ivic. Antonijevic, a member of the DSS, most recently was a deputy coordinator of CCK, and prior to that was chairman of the Serbian National Council (SNV).

13. (U) The MOK does not have dedicated office space and is currently operating out of the Government Building (Nemanjina 11) where the Prime Minister's offices are located. CCK continues to be based in the Federal Palace

in New Belgrade.

Substantive Mandate

14. (SBU) Assistant Minister Ljubomir Kljakic told poloff on June 5 that the Ministry's primary missions are to coordinate Kosovo policy throughout the GOS and "manage" relations with other countries and international organizations regarding Kosovo. He specifically mentioned that the MOK would coordinate the Kosovo-related policies involving the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Interior, International Economic Relations and Telecommunications. Kljakic said that, for example, if the Foreign Minister travels abroad and engages on the Kosovo issue, that his statements would be done in coordination with the MOK. When asked directly, Kljakic said the Presidency would also be "coordinated in the same fashion."

15. (SBU) Kljakic said the MOK would also oversee the GOS negotiating team for Kosovo for any future talks. The substantive starting point for the Ministry is, as Kljakic said, that fresh talks are a "reasonable assumption" now that the EU and UNSC's "perspectives have matured" enough to be "ready to lower rigidity and question views" on Kosovo and be willing to approach Kosovo status "with open eyes."

16. (SBU) According to Kljakic, the technical nature of the CCK's existing work would remain unchanged. The creation of the Ministry will simply add a layer on top of the CCK which will coordinate internal and international management of Kosovo policy, which is "intense" and "multifaceted" enough to require a whole ministry for coordination.

Influence without responsibility

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17. (SBU) In a separate meeting on June 26, Prorokovic told polcouns that the MOK would "influence" the other ministries involved in Kosovo while indicating that responsibility for implementation would stay with the relevant ministry. For example, Prorokovic said, if a school or hospital needed to be built in Kosovo, the Education or Health Ministries would carry out the task. The MOK, however, would be allocated a budget and appropriate funds and "advise" the relevant ministry. Two real examples of how the MOK's influence without responsibility were immediately available (paras 8 and 9).

18. (SBU) Polcouns asked Prorokovic directly about the GOS plan allegedly passed to the Russians in advance of Kennebunkport. Prorokovic called it a "technical document...written in response to Putin's request" to Kostunica for a Serbian plan for Kosovo and that he could not share the contents. He maintained, though, that there was "nothing new" in the points passed to Moscow that was not already contained in the GoS proposal delivered to the UNSC during its recent visit to Belgrade. He further explained that it had not been circulated to other institutions because Minister Samardzic gave it to the Russian Ambassador "in his capacity empowered by the parliament," referring to the 2/14/07 reaffirmation of the GOS negotiating team by the newly elected MPs (but well before a government formation). Therefore, Prorokovic said, it was not a government document and did not need to be circulated throughout the various ministries, parliament or the Presidency. Post nevertheless requested a copy, as has been done with the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs and the President's office (all of which did not have one).

19. (SBU) Polcouns also raised the publicized plans for

groups of Serbs to march into Kosovo for Vitovdan on June 28, and that the USG wanted to make clear to the GOS that Belgrade must do everything in its power to rein in extremist elements and any other destabilizing factor associated with the march. Prorokovic shrugged off the representation, essentially saying the actions of any marchers were not his ministry's responsibility. He added that Serbia could not be responsible for the actions of any non-state group on a non-state trip. Polcouns reiterated the expectation, noting that similar clear messages had been made to the Interior Ministry.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) As an interagency body responsible for coordinating several Ministries' Kosovo policy, the MOK effectively accomplishes two things for Kostunica: it is his tool to manage GOS Kosovo policy without competition and a political structure which keeps the coalition parties in line both on Kosovo and in government. The Presidency appears to have been willingly removed from any shared responsibility on Kosovo. Tadic currently has no permanent Kosovo advisor and he works from the same talking points as Kostunica in public comments.

¶11. (SBU) Comment con't: As demonstrated by the MOK's handling of the "secret plan" and Vitovdan, the Ministry can make its mandate suit its needs depending on the circumstance. The MOK gives Kostunica the ability to advise, comment on, and control almost all of the GOS' policy inside Kosovo, as well as to deflect any real accountability to other Serbian institutions or away from Serbia entirely. End comment.

¶12. (U) Begin text of official bio of Serbian Minister for Kosovo Slobodan Samardzic:

Born in Belgrade in 1953. He graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, where he also obtained his PhD. He was editor of scientific and political program at Radio Belgrade from 1982 to 1984. He is a regular professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade. He was advisor for political issues to former Yugoslav president and later Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica. He headed the Serbian government's committee for decentralization and is member of the state negotiating team on the future status of Kosovo-Metohija. Speaks English and German. Married, with three children.

End text.

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¶13. (U) Begin excerpt of GOS Law on Ministries

Article 24

The Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija is responsible for government administration related to: functioning of the institutions of the Republic of Serbia on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija; education, health care, social policy, culture, infrastructure and telecommunications in Serbian regions of Kosovo and Metohija; activities of the Serbian Orthodox Church; renewal of spiritual and cultural heritage; financial, legal, technical and human resources assistance in all fields significant for Serbs and other non-Albanian communities on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija; cooperation with the Commissioner for Refugees in the segment relating to internal displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija; formulating proposal of law regulating the essential autonomy of Kosovo and Metohija; cooperation with the civil and military mission of the UN on Kosovo and Metohija (UNMIK and KFOR); recommending to the Government the new negotiating team tasked with all international activities relating to continuation of

negotiations for resolving the future status of Kosovo and Metohija; managing activities of the State negotiating team; maintaining constant international contacts with participants in the international negotiating process for defining the future status of Kosovo and Metohija, as well as other tasks defined by law.

End text.

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